

91ST SPACE WING

Minot Air Force Base

by Ms Paulette Dailey

Minot AFB, North Dakota, hosts the 91st Space Wing, one of the Air Force's three operational missile units. The 91st SW personnel, known as the Rough Riders, defend the United States with safe, secure ICBMs ready to act on a moment's notice. Additionally, the 91st SW is deactivating remote ICBM sites at Grand Forks AFB ND.

The on-alert missiles assigned to the 91st SW are under the operational control of the nation's strategic warfighting command, US Strategic Command, headquartered at Offutt AFB NE. Minuteman missiles provide a quick-reacting, highly survivable element to America's strategic triad. The Minuteman weapon system is the safest, most reliable and maintainable ballistic missile system in the United States. In 1963, Minot AFB became the nation's third operational Minuteman base, with deployment of the Minuteman I missile. The Minuteman III replaced the Minuteman I in 1971—the 91SW was the first wing in the Air Force to receive the Minuteman III. The Minuteman III is a 3-stage, solid-fuel ICBM. It has the capability to carry three independently targetable reentry vehicles armed with strategic weapons. Four sets of three targets can be stored in the missile's guidance system. A hallmark of the weapon system is that assigned crews can remotely retarget each missile. A tested system of authentication codes and hardware safeguards ensures Minuteman missiles cannot be launched without valid direction of the National Command Authority. The missile is capable of speeds in excess of 15,000 miles per hour and has a unit cost of \$7 million.





The wing controls 150 Minuteman III missiles, located over an 8,500 square mile area in north central North Dakota, approximately the same size as the state of Massachusetts. Each missile is located in an unmanned remote silo called a launch facility (LF). All LFs are located at least three nautical miles apart and situated in unpopulated areas. The missiles are housed in hardened underground silos. Each LF has all the equipment needed to maintain the missile in a ready-to-launch condition. All activities at the LFs are monitored and controlled from remote, manned launch control centers (LCC).

Each underground LCC houses missile combat crews of two officers operating in 24-hour alert tours. During the tour, the crew controls a flight of 10 missiles and has the capability to monitor and control an entire squadron of 50 missiles. LCCs are interconnected by hardened, buried, wire cable communication links used by combat crews for status reporting, coordination of missile programming, and launch actions. Thus, each crew can launch any missile in its squadron, not just the missiles in its flight.

Each LCC is part of a missile alert facility (MAF). The wing's 15 MAFs are comprised of a topside facility, normally manned by a minimum of eight people, and an underground complex consisting of an LCC and an underground support building.

The wing has approximately 1,500 operations, maintenance, security, and support personnel working together to keep missiles on alert. The wing is made up of two groups, the 91st Operations Group and the 91st Logistics Group. Five squadrons, a helicopter flight, and a standardization/evaluation division are assigned to the 91st Operations Group. Three squadrons and a quality assurance section are assigned to the 91st Logistics Group. Included in this group is the 791st Maintenance Squadron, a geographically separated unit located at Grand Forks AFB ND. The mission of the 791st MXS is to safely dismantle 100 LFs and 10 MAFs, returning critical assets to the Air Force supply system and removing all environmentally harmful hazardous waste. The 5th Communication Squadron receives Air Force Space Command headquarters funding to maintain all communication links within the missile field.

Paulette Dailey and Technical Sergeant James Stroud manage 91st SW finances. As a tenant on an Air Combat Command base, 91st SW financial transactions are processed through the 5th Bomb Wing. We have established a productive rapport with the 5th Comptroller Squadron and our financial transactions are afforded the same level of responsiveness as all transactions across the base. We are transitioning to Automated Business Services System and with prompt and accurate data inputs expect a significant reduction in time lags and operating location transaction errors.

Our major challenges rotate between accurate expense posting and isolation of errors in the financial system. Within the past eight months, we added full-time resource advisor positions in the Logistics and Operations Groups. With expanding financial responsibilities, these essential positions enable the wing to fully monitor missile maintenance and flying hour program expenses, reimbursements to the host unit, and International Merchant Purchasing Authorization Card purchases.

As a tenant, our \$27 million budget remains smaller than most units; however, we oversee financial responsibilities in several areas across the wing. Over the years we have built a substantial facility funding line allowing us to maintain quality of life standards. And without the benefit of a travel section, we provide oversight and metrics to track the wing travel card program. Our motto remains Only the Best Come North!

